

Listening Avidly

AVID DIVA II (£1000 without arm)

Designed, machined and assembled in the UK, the mkII Diva represents a wealth of high-value engineering

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It was a brave move going into business making record players in the mid 1990s when LPs were already relegated to niche status. As Avid's founder and chief designer Conrad Mas is wont to point out: 'My friends and family thought I was bonkers.'

Conrad's bravery, coupled with his belief that there was still a market for high-end record players that were immaculately finished and built to last, has proved well founded. From humble beginnings Avid has grown to become an internationally recognised brand name among vinyl enthusiasts. Today the company's home is a 15,000 square feet factory in Cambridgeshire with CNC milling tools and lathes that make it entirely self-sufficient, manufacturing all parts in-house.

ENTER THE DIVA

With a range of turntables, from the flagship Acutus Reference with its massive, 10kg mirror-finished platter (£10950), through the Sequel, Volvere and 'entry' Diva models, Avid now exports to some 30 countries. In fact the Diva was first designed at the request of Avid's Japanese distributor in order to hit a specific price point. Now dubbed Diva II it was remodelled during 2008 to better match the rest of Avid's range and keep the price below £1000, the escalating cost of materials making the original Diva no longer viable.

As our photographs and captions describe the construction of the Diva II far better than words alone, I need only point out that the substantial motor is in fact an entirely separate unit. It's an eminently sensible solution for preventing motor noise entering the turntable's chassis but, as highlighted in Paul Miller's Lab Report, positioning of the motor and correct tension of the drive belt is critical for best performance and speed accuracy. Whatever you do, it's critical to ensure the motor housing does not touch the recessed cutout within the Diva's subchassis, if noise is not to be directly



GOOD VIBRATIONS

In common with Avid's more expensive turntables, the Diva II's chassis is a one piece ultra rigid alloy casting, obviating a separate armband and thus designed to prevent any relative movement between the arm and platter bearing which might cause loss of information. Avid's proprietor and chief designer Conrad Mas intends that vibrations created by the stylus during playback should be channeled to the chassis, through the pick up arm and main bearing and then rapidly dissipated.

Of course, common sense would suggest that there's no such thing as a 'mechanical diode' with an equal chance of energy travelling back the other way. Consequently, such a 'rigid loop system' of platter, chassis and arm necessarily requires careful isolation of the deck from external vibrations.



injected into the structure. Avid makes an isolation platform with Sorbothane feet priced at £190 which not only affords additional vibration isolation for the Diva II but also means you can move the deck without having to set it up again.

The motor is driven from a separate power supply with a rotary on/off switch on the fascia which is satisfying to use, the pleasure factor enhanced by the rapid start-up of the platter. The substantial record clamp comes from Avid's more expensive Volvere and Sequel models and is also a joy to use on a daily basis. As with all skeletal decks it's going to be difficult to keep dust at bay and you're going to want one of Avid's

ABOVE: Our sample of the Diva II was equipped with an Jelco SA-250 tonearm and Reson Aciore MC cartridge

'The Diva II sounded bold and eager – brass and percussion were especially crisp and highly vivid'

acrylic covers – either the Flat cover (£70) which clamps onto the platter, or the Full cover (£350).

SECRETS OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Of course, when listening to a turntable one is hearing the marriage of a turntable, arm and cartridge combination. For customers on a tight budget Avid supplies the Jelco SA-250ST arm from Japan (£480) and chose to deliver our review deck fitted with a DNM/Reson Aciore MC cartridge (£360). All listening was done with the player on the top shelf of my Townshend Seismic Sink Stand in order to minimise vibration. I also used a Graham Slee Fanfare MC phono stage which proved an ideal companion.

Auditioning began with the LPO's performance of 'A Sussex Overture' from the two LP set *Arnold Overtures* [Reference Recordings RR-48]. An audiophile favourite since its release in 1992, this half-speed master is a sharply-lit recording from Watford Town Hall. While lacking a little of the bass 'wallop' that I'm accustomed to (from a Townshend Rock Reference which, like Avid's biggest decks, costs many times the price!) the Diva II sounded bold and eager. Brass and percussion were crisp and highly vivid, the overall character of this (familiar) recording remaining broadly intact. ➔

AUDIO FILE

Two speed, belt-drive turntable with optional Jelco tonearm

Price: £1000 (no arm)

Made and supplied by: Avid Hi-fi Ltd

Telephone: 01480 457300

Web: www.avidhifi.co.uk

TURNTABLE TEST



ABOVE: The Jelco arm uses a 'one point cross suspension' bearing and includes spring-loaded bias adjustment

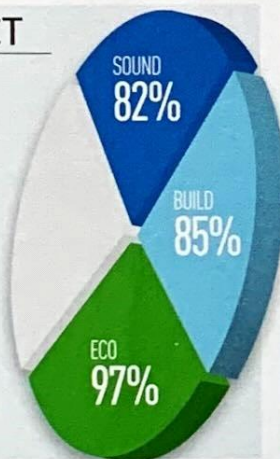
Initial impressions of the Diva II's explicit and vivid character were maintained when listening to the LP *Castalia* by jazz trumpeter Mark Isham [Virgin V2513]. I've been enjoying this album for 20 years thanks to the explosive playing of my favourite drum and bass partnership: Terry Bozzio and Patrick O'Hearn. Again, I missed the low-end 'rumblings' that I know are present on the recording when O'Hearn allows open bass strings to reverberate and Bozzio assaults his kit like no other since the passing of Keith Moon. But to complain about the lack of very low bass would be churlish, given that the Diva II costs £1000 and as such is designed to be partnered with modest amplification and loudspeakers. The Revel Ultima Studio 2 floorstanding speakers I'm currently, er, revelling in at home require something like Avid's flagship Acutus to fully do them justice. The absence of very low bass would not be missed in a more modest system.

SEEING RESON

As I plundered my record collection it became obvious that this combination of Diva II/Jelco/Reson Aciore is a highly competent and most enjoyable package. On checking the setup with Ortofon's *Pick Up Test Record* [Ortofon 0002] the cartridge sailed through all the 315Hz vertical tracking ability tests and managed all but the highest (80µm) lateral tracking tests too, which is excellent for a moving coil. Music tracks on this test LP are from the Swedish Opus 3 audiophile label, the track 'Moppin and Boppin' by the Peoria Jazzband highlighting the Diva's strong transient attack and great imaging, with the clarinet forward of the stage and the drum kit further back – just as it should be. ☺

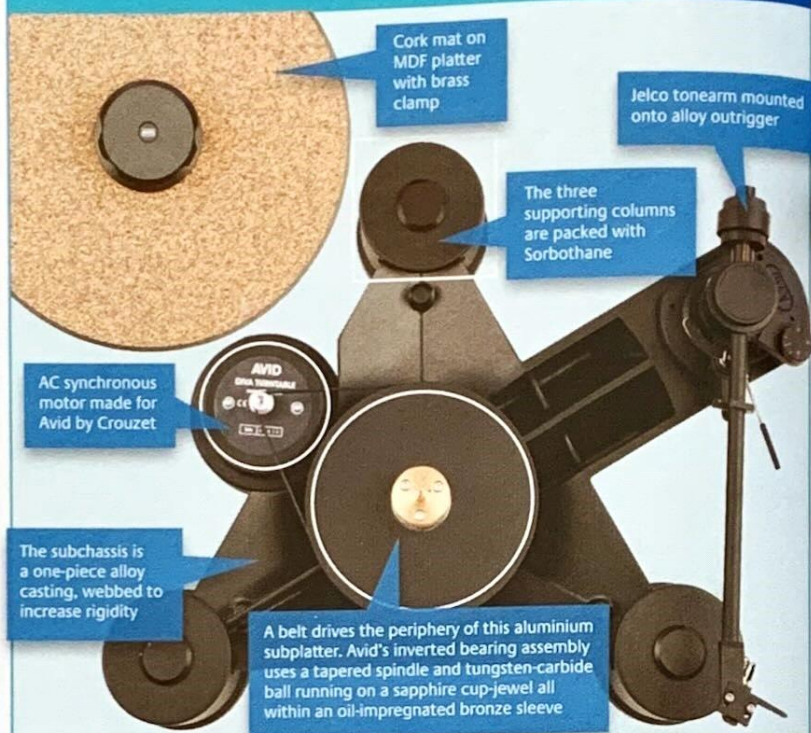
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

While the Diva II might be Avid's cheapest turntable it nevertheless feels like it will last a lifetime. Build quality is reassuringly solid and finish is first rate. Sound quality is best described as explicit and up-beat, the combination we enjoyed with modest Jelco arm and Reson Aciore MC cartridge representing a really excellent value package at £1840 in total.



AVID DIVA II TURNTABLE / £1000 (no arm)

Hi-fi news
LAB RESULTS



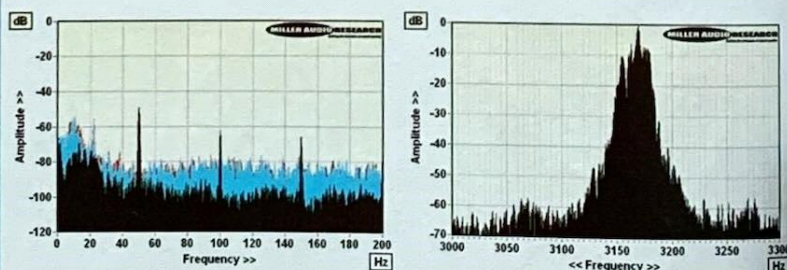
HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

A key feature of the Diva II is its threaded spindle and substantial record clamp – but should you always squeeze every record flat against the platter's cork surface? Certainly, if the record has an obvious warp and your choice of arm/cartridge has a low (<8Hz) combined resonant frequency then there's every reason to flatten the disc and prevent high amplitude subsonic frequencies from entering the amplifier/speaker chain. Otherwise, there's just as much chance of coupling the record more effectively to any bearing noise.

In this instance, the weighted noise (re. 5cm/sec) through an unmodulated groove is -66dB with the clamp and -68dB without the clamp, this slight increase caused by a broader noise contribution around 10Hz with the clamp in place. This is just visible as the red background trace on the graph, below left.

The unweighted noise, dominated by 50Hz components through the synchronous AC motor, is unaffected by clamping and amounts to some -49dB (re. 1kHz, 5cm/sec), which is fine for a turntable in this class. The Diva's speed stability also compares favourably with its peers, showing some broadening of the main peak [see graph, below right] caused by a low-rate wow (~0.11% peak) plus – if you look carefully – two daughter sidebands at ±100Hz. The broadening and motor cogging artefacts are influenced by your placement of the motor assembly and the subsequent tensioning of the belt – too tight and the cogging increases, too loose and both W&F are prone to increase.

Readers can view a full QC Suite report for the Avid Diva II by navigating to www.hifinews.co.uk and clicking on the red 'download' button. PM



ABOVE LEFT: Bearing rumble (black infill) versus silent LP groove with/without clamp (red/blue infill) re. 5cm/sec; ABOVE RIGHT: Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted ±150Hz, 5Hz per minor division)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm | 33.54rpm (+0.63%) |
| Time to audible stabilisation | 3.0 sec |
| Peak Wow & Flutter | 0.11% / 0.12% |
| Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd) | -68.0dB |
| Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd) | -70.6dB |
| Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec) | -49.4dB |